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## Smell Me! Adapting to Kafka's Monkey

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## **Smell Me!**

### **Adapting to *Kafka's Monkey***

Animals first entered the imagination as messengers and promises.

John Berger, 'Why Look at Animals?'

*The Young Vic Theatre, London. May 2011. A figure walks on to the almost bare stage, dressed formally in white tie and tails, in a bowler hat and white gloves, carrying a sheaf of papers, a suitcase, a stick. The figure bows, waits, straightens. The figure bows again, deeper this time. There is applause. The figure holds itself oddly, the expression on its face hard to read, altering quickly, at once both inquisitive and guarded.*

*The stage is dominated by the projection of a black and white image, a close-up of a face. Downcast, it appears to be observing the figure, but not to be offering anything to the audience. In this, it is not so different from the subjects of so many early modern paintings, eyes averted. Only a king looks straight out, challenging the viewer to meet the royal gaze. Except that this is the face of a chimpanzee. The figure seems disconcerted by the presence of the image, and crosses to a lectern, laying the sheaf of papers on it with an exaggerated sweep of the arm. The figure scans the audience.*

*The figure speaks.*

\*

Adaptation is always a matter of relationality, that is, it lays bare the dependence

of theatrical presentation on gestures of identification, on repetition and recognition, but – like any relation properly understood – it is not best thought of as a linear move from one work to another. Adaptation establishes relations of co-presence and co-dependence that place at stake the identities of both the adaptation and that (to) which it adapts. In theatrical adaptation, I want to suggest, this relation must also involve the audience. An exemplary instance of the power of adaptation's exposure of this form of relation is perceptible in *Kafka's Monkey*, an adaptation with a script by Colin Teevan of a short narrative by Franz Kafka, which was first staged at the Young Vic in 2009, in a production directed by Walter Meierjohann (see Teevan 2011).<sup>1</sup>

Kafka's text, 'Ein Bericht für eine Akademie' (2002, 299-313) ('A Report to An Academy' [1993, 195-204]) was first published in 1917.<sup>2</sup> Kafka's short tale gives us the story of Rotpeter or Red Peter, a chimpanzee, wounded and captured on the Gold Coast. At the moment of delivering the report, Peter has become a star performer on the European variety stage. Already famous, Peter is invited to make a report on his 'life as an ape' to the unspecified Academy. The frame for the narrative is explicitly pedagogical and performative.

There have been many other 'performances' – that is, for the most part, dramatic readings – of Kafka's text, but what sets *Kafka's Monkey* apart is the physical embodiment of Red Peter's predicament by Kathryn Hunter, an actress who has played other 'male' roles including King Lear (at the Leicester Haymarket in 1997) and other quasi-human roles such as the title creature in the original National Theatre production of Caryl Churchill's *The Skriker* (1994). As Catherine Diamond suggests: 'Kafka's piece is frequently delivered in the German theatre, but Hunter's version is qualitatively different in her exacting "simianification", her inhabiting the male ape body to a degree not previously attempted' (2015, 266). Hunter's performance stresses the physicality of Peter

through a form of imitation that is a curious inversion of the process described in the tale. Kafka might have approved, perhaps, of this casting. Famously drawn to the Yiddish theatre troupe who came from Lemberg to Prague in 1910 to play at the Café Savoy, he became a friend of one of the performers, Yitschak Löwy (Beck 1971). As Sander Gilman suggests, Kafka was ‘especially struck by Flora Klug, who was playing men’s roles’ (2005, 51).

Hunter spent months observing apes and working with both the director, Meierjohann, and a movement coach, Ilan Reichel, to effectively produce a devised performance keyed to Kafka’s text. In a profile by Alice Jones in *The Independent* (3 March 2009), the team suggest that much of the rehearsal process was given over to fine tuning the ‘dosage’ of ape to human characteristics. On one level, this is an extension of actor training practices (see Saner), but what it does in this piece is to externalise and invert the relation of rehearsal to performance. Preparation for playing a human part by observing animals becomes layered over by the fiction of Peter’s observation of humans that is central to Kafka’s story.

This reverse mimesis also extends in another sense to the relation to the spectator. If, in Kafka’s text, Peter learns from humans, in *Kafka’s Monkey* audience members are invited to ‘learn’ from Peter. In one of the most striking elements of metatheatricity, Peter interacts with the audience in such a way that they are positioned as the ones who must *adapt to* the demands of the character/performer. Curiously, it is during such moments of teaching that Peter’s ‘ape’ nature comes most strongly to the fore in the performance.

*The figure drops into a squat. Looking up, the figure recalls watching a pair of acrobats go through a routine, the figure's head swivelling as they swing, eyes following the back and forth, describing how one is hanging by her hair from the teeth of the other. 'So that is human freedom, I said to myself'. Red Peter is waiting for his turn on the stage, but he cannot help commenting wryly that if this mockery of nature is representative of human freedom, then that's not what he needs. Indeed, he comments that if an audience of chimpanzees were to see this spectacle, 'the walls of the theatre would rupture with the roar of their laughter'. Red Peter imitates the laughter of the apes. Is the audience to join in, or not?*

\*

Describing a trip to the zoo in his essay 'Ape Theatre' (1992, 139-53), John Berger notes a curious relationship that emerges from or as the 'performance' given by the apes:

In Basel we are watching a strange theatre in which, on both sides of the glass, the performers may believe they are an audience. On both sides the drama begins with resemblance and the uneasy relationship that exists between resemblance and closeness. (143)

Strangeness is not a quality to be possessed, it is a function of relation, it always 'comes between', like the pane of glass that separates performers and audience. But to think of this as separation is not entirely right, or at least, the idea needs qualification. This is not so much opposition as a kind of co-dependence. The performer needs recognition of her or his performance, even if the witness to it is

at the same time the one who performs. The audience member or spectator needs to be able to say, with greater or lesser certainty, what it is that he or she has witnessed, or at the very least that something has been witnessed. The relation between the world of the spectator and that of the performer is not one of simple correspondence – nor is it easily dismissed as a fiction – but is perhaps best understood, in Dan Rebellato’s sense (2009), as metaphorical. Here, the first layer of metaphorical functioning is that which allows for the visitor to the zoo to think of the lives of the captive apes as a performance, and this metaphorical structure is prior to any attempt to interpret what is being performed.

In Berger’s ‘Ape Theatre’, there is an invitation to identification, always double (identification *of* and identification *with*), and always susceptible both to failure and to disavowal. The desire to see in the other the traces of oneself meets the imperative to see the other as other; this is where it might be necessary to attempt to distinguish between another and an other. But the binaries of identification are blurred, it seems, by this notion of closeness: the recognition of closeness allows for the *not quite* resembling, and that economy of likeness, of more or less and of more-or-less, can be the cause of fear, desire, and so on, that expresses itself as unease (on this sense of unease, see also Ridout 2006). Berger encapsulates this disquiet in a central question: ‘how is it that they are so like us and yet not us?’

Berger’s essay develops this question in two directions: first, he is concerned – as in so much of his work – with the relation between the human and the animal, where the animal is an index of the forms of life that may be distinguished by identifying their relative ‘closeness’ to nature; second, he sees in the ‘theatrical’ nature of this relation a way of thinking about time. The two concerns intersect in ‘Ape Theatre’ through a consideration of neo-Darwinist thinking, but this does not lead to a linear sense of temporal unfolding or of

simple causality. Berger's use of the theatrical metaphor is not gratuitous but instead stems from a particular understanding of theatre that highlights two temporal dimensions. The first is repetition. Berger asks: 'Is theatre possible without an awareness of re-enactment, which is related to a sense of death?' (141) The second dimension is that of presence, and this allows for a distinction between theatre and other art forms:

The theatre, more tangibly than any other art, presents us with the past. Paintings may show what the past looked like, but they are like traces or footprints, they no longer move. With each theatre performance, what once happened is re-enacted. [...] Theatre depends upon two times physically co-existing. The hour of the performance and the moment of the drama. If you read a novel, you leave the present; in the theatre, you never leave the present. The past becomes the present in the only way that it is possible for this to happen. And this unique possibility is theatre. (151)

Theatre is defined against both painting and the novel, in that both reveal what theatre is not; what we experience in theatre is both mobile and divided. (But, for a fruitful complication of the temporal implications of novel-reading, see Currie 2007.) Presence is understood primarily as a matter of re-enactment rather than enactment, that is, it is not so much pure presence but rather a form of presentation; the past becomes present by being presented, but it does not displace the present, it co-exists with it. There is a kind of fold in time, a doubling, but it is important to recall the initial identification that Berger makes between the awareness of re-enactment and the sense of death.

All theatrical presentation enacts an invitation to identification. But what if the role (with which) one is asked to identify is that of an animal? What does that do to processes of identification? Increasing attention has been paid in the last decade to the roles that animals have played on stage. (For a cogent survey, see the introduction to Parker-Starbuck and Orozco, eds, 2015, 1-15.) Here, I would like to concentrate on an instance of the older and persisting tradition of actors ‘playing’ animals.

For the remainder of this article, I would like to think about these questions by revisiting the work of Franz Kafka before returning to its theatrical adaptation in *Kafka's Monkey*. In many respects, Kafka is too obvious a starting point. One of the most widely acknowledged aspects of Kafka's novels and early stories is a sensation of the *theatrum mundi* in which characters feel themselves to be constantly subject to observation and judgment. As Mark Anderson (2003) points out, this is perhaps to be expected in the Jewish context in which Kafka wrote, that is, in Central Europe in the first decades of the twentieth century, but the inflection given to the *theatrum mundi* in these texts makes it one of the key elements in what is frequently called the ‘Kafkaesque’.

Many critics have noted the influence of Kafka on both practitioners and also those who have theorised theatre. Freddie Rokem, for example, gives an account of how Kafka's texts might illuminate the relation of performance and philosophy by examining the discussions between Brecht and Benjamin (2010, 118-37). (On Benjamin and Brecht's relationship, see also Müller-Schöll, 2002.) But as Martin Puchner proposes, even if Kafka's work has proved fruitful for thinking theatre and performance, this is attributable to the fact that: ‘At best, Kafka and the theater have had a history of contest, most visibly registered in the seemingly unending failures of theatrical Kafka adaptations, and also perhaps in



their few successes' (2003a, 163). Puchner roots the failure in a resistance to theatre that Kafka's texts themselves present precisely because they contain a distinctive but 'peculiar' (we might say strange) theatricality. He argues that the texts' very theatricality interferes with attempts to render them theatrical by adaptation: 'These texts do not so much imagine the theater as they decompose it, deriving their stylistic and representational techniques from an antitheatrical impulse' (164). (On modernist antitheatricality, see Puchner 2002.) Primary in this antitheatricality is a distaste for the anthropomorphizing, humanizing aspect of theatrical presentation that he sees as an inevitable effect of the physical presence of the actor on stage (2003b, 182-84). This resistance to the actor's body results in a decomposition into gestures, and this emphasis on gesture becomes central to the reading of Kafka given by Walter Benjamin (see Benjamin, but also Hamacher 1996).

Kafka's characters frequently encounter animals and, as is well known, in extreme cases – such as perhaps his most celebrated story *The Metamorphosis* (*Die Verwandlung*, 1915) – even become them. There is no simple opposition between human and animal in Kafka. One of the aphorisms in 'Reflections on Sin, Suffering, Hope, and the True Way' (§20), in *The Blue Octavo Notebooks* (1991, 87-98, 88), for example, tells us: 'Leopards break into the temple and drink to the dregs what is in the sacrificial pitchers; this is repeated over and over again; finally it can be calculated in advance, and it becomes part of the ceremony'. The process suggested here is at once theatrical – repetitious, ritualistic, but also open to disruption by the contingent, to which it then improvises a response – and best thought of as a kind of adaptation. Some readers of Kafka might take such scenes as emblematic. Saul Friedländer, for example, argues for a biographical approach to reading Kafka that reveals 'Kafka's ongoing ambivalence between adaptation and rebellion', in which his hatred of that adaptation is clear, and Friedländer

argues therefore that in his fiction Kafka ‘demolished the very norms to which he submitted in everyday life’ (2013, 11).

Thinkers of the relation between literature and philosophy have often turned to this element in Kafka. Deleuze and Guattari (1975/1986) make the encounter of human and animal central to their account of Kafka, offering the notion of ‘becoming-animal’ as a crucial node in their response to his work. More tellingly, perhaps, their definition of minor literature rests precisely on the relation between the strange and the familiar, that is, on a kind of uncanny closeness that provokes unease, and for which Kafka becomes the exemplary example. Similarly, J. M. Coetzee finds resources in the ‘Report’ specifically that frame his thinking of the animal and ethics in *Elisabeth Costello* (2004, but first published 1999) and *The Lives of Animals* (1999) (see also the fascinating reading in Mulhall).

But there is also a curious insistence among readers of Kafka’s work in thinking of it in terms of resemblance and likeness. One of the more cunning variations on this is Borges’s ‘Kafka and His Precursors’ (2000, 234-36), in which he notes the apparent paradox that while it is possible to find traces of Kafka in the work of many earlier writers – that is, there is a resemblance between that writing and Kafka’s texts – these ‘precursors’ do not necessarily resemble each other. The connections between these earlier texts are only identifiable retrospectively, that is, to those who are aware of Kafka’s ‘idiosyncrasy’. Each writer creates his own precursors, concludes Borges, and this forces a reinterpretation of the past as well as modifying the future.

*As if struck by a sudden thought, Red Peter picks up a silver tray bearing two bananas. The audience has already been made aware of them as a handy prop to demonstrate where Peter was captured. This time he offers one to the audience, peeling it before giving it to a volunteer. As he interacts with the audience, he notices another person in the front row, stopping to groom their hair, finding something tasty, eating it. He promises to come back to finish the rest later. He resumes his narrative.*

\*

As Max Brod recognises, the Report's narrative inverts the usual transformation that Kafka's texts present, and Brod's unease with this is apparent. Noting how, in *Metamorphosis*, 'the man who is not perfect, Kafka degrades to an animal, to an insect', Brod then says, 'Or, what is still more horrible ('A Report to an Academy'), he lets the animal be raised to the level of a human being, but to what a level of humanity, to a masquerade at which mankind is unmasked' (1995, 134-35). Brod's biography appeared in 1937, but he is here quoting from an article he first published in the *Neue Rundschau* in November 1921, and this early reading of the text proved influential. The move from human to animal, Brod suggests, is a degradation of the human, but the move from animal to human calls into question the human itself, unmasking humanity by means of masquerade. Brod is repelled by the relation of human and animal. But as Kata Gellen has argued (2011), the story of Red Peter can also be aligned with a series of texts that evidence Kafka's fascination with a hybrid figure, and so, for example, he finds especially appealing the 'animal' quality of literary recitation.

So what exactly is this Report? The piece presents itself as the record of a performance. Kafka's text begins with a direct address to the 'Honoured

Gentlemen of the Academy' [*Hohe Herren von der Akademie!*], immediately positioning the reader as one of those members. This is a position that, as the story unfolds, becomes increasingly uncomfortable.

The Report has been read in a variety of ways. For example, it could be claimed that it tackles the nature of a universal human experience, an exposure of the violence and brutality that underpin human, and especially Western, culture. Read like this, Red Peter comes to stand for the state of humanity as a whole. A variation on this reading sees it as more specifically about the movement from childhood to adulthood, in which the child achieves socialization outside the family. Carolin Duttlinger, for example, offers a version of this reading, quoting a letter in which Kafka describes himself as his parents' 'ape' (2013, 78-80). The Report has also been given a more pointedly colonial or postcolonial reading, in which Red Peter's treatment reflects a particular moment in the imperial and colonial relations between Europe and Africa. Perhaps most frequently it has been read as an allegory of Jewish experience, where Red Peter's tale becomes a condemnation of Jewish assimilation into European culture, a suggestion reinforced by the fact that the piece was first published in the Zionist journal *The Jew* (*Der Jude*), edited by Martin Buber. The Report was one of two animal tales by Kafka – the other being 'Jackals and Arabs' – published in *Der Jude* in 1917. The publication was something of an experiment for Buber, and he was prompted to it by Max Brod (see Stach 2013, 177-79). For Sander Gilman:

Both tales reflect quite directly on the demon that Kafka sees among the Reform Jews of Western Europe – the need to but also the impossibility of transforming themselves into something, anything else. But his publishing strategy is also clear – the avant-garde and the Jewish, the Jewish and the avant-garde are his two audiences; they overlap and provide quite different

readings of his texts. He plays with his audiences, knowing full well their expectations and his ability to answer and manipulate them. (2005, 89-90)

What is striking is the way in which Gilman identifies two distinct but overlapping audiences even for the initial publication. Kafka resisted Buber's attempts to present the two stories as parables, however, preferring (in a letter of 12 May 1917) that they take the more neutral heading of 'Two Animal Stories'.

For many readers, what also seems to figure in this story of the relation between what we call the human and what some might call the non-human animal is a rejection of a certain quasi-Darwinian humanist narrative of biological progress from the animal to the human. This potentially opens the narrative up to a reading in terms of a certain conception of the posthuman. The posthuman here is not being thought of as a mark of the exhaustion of the human as a category, but rather as an index of the extent to which it has always been bound in a relation with that to which it has customarily been opposed (see Robson 2013).

Curiously, the excitement of reading his first story published in *Der Jude* leads Kafka to a moment of animal self-identification, since he confides to his diary that he behaved 'like a squirrel in a cage'. The cage is perhaps the most telling element here (see Kafka 1991, 14).

With Kafka, as Maurice Blanchot suggests so strikingly in a series of essays devoted to his work, it is not a matter of choosing between interpretations or of resolving the enigmatic moments by referral outside to a secure context. If Kafka's works seem to invite both frank misunderstanding and a variety of attempts to ground an understanding in biography, the texts frequently undercut such attempts. As Blanchot puts it in 'Reading Kafka' (1995, 1-11): 'These texts reflect the uneasiness [*malaise*] of a reading that seeks to conserve the enigma

and its solution, the misunderstanding and the expression of this misunderstanding, the possibility of reading [*lire*] within the impossibility of interpreting this reading [*cette lecture*]’ (5). (See ‘La Lecture de Kafka’, first published in 1943 [1981, 62-74, 67]). Kafka’s texts are all too readable, reading [*lire*] always appears possible, but there is always a sense that no particular reading [*lecture*] can present itself as secure. Blanchot suggests in *The Infinite Conversation* that this is tied to the fact that commentary is necessarily a matter of repetition and doubling:

to repeat the work is to grasp – to hear – in it the repetition that establishes it as a unique work. Now this repetition – this originary possibility of existing doubly – will not be reducible to the imitation of an interior or an exterior model, be it the book of another writer or life (the life of the world, of the author) or the kind of project that would be the work in the writer’s mind [*esprit*], a work already entirely written, but in a reduced model he would be content to transpose on the outside [*au-dehors*] by enlarging it or reproducing it, taking dictation from the little man in him who is god (1993, 389, translation modified. Blanchot 1981, 185-201, 187-88. First published 1964).

Where Berger sees repeatability at the heart of theatricality, Blanchot also sees it as essential to the singularity of the prose work, and warns against the consoling simplifications of either biographical or too referentially contextual readings.

While finding a frame for the resonance of the narrative as a whole is perhaps impossible, at the centre of the tale is the question of education and acculturation. Red Peter's story is fundamentally one of what it means to learn how to be human, opening up the faultline between nature and culture. Differences in readings often hinge on what is understood by those two terms. The first thing Peter learns is a handshake, which he takes as a mark of frankness or openness [*Offenheit*]. It is no accident, of course, that it is often the hand that is taken to mark out human or near-human capabilities. Red Peter tells of how he was shot while coming down to the shore for a drink, and of how he acquired his name by virtue of the scar from the first of his wounds. We then hear of his shipboard captivity in a cage too low to stand in and too narrow to sit down in, so that he is forced to squat as the bars bite into his flesh. The mordant humour of the piece may be heard in his comment on the notion that 'Such a method of confining wild beasts is supposed to have its advantages during the first days of captivity, and out of my own experiences I cannot deny that *from the human point of view* this is really the case' (197, my emphasis) (*Man hält eine solche Verwahrung wilder Tiere in der allerersten Zeit für vorteilhaft, und ich kann heute nach meiner Erfahrung nicht leugnen, daß dies im menschlichen Sinn tatsächlich der Fall ist.* [302-03]). The sense of perspective is complicated precisely by the problem of identifying and identifying with that *menschlichen Sinn*, that human point of view, and this will become more and more difficult both for Peter and for the reader as the story progresses. All that Red Peter can see at this stage is that there is no way out of his physical position, but even this characterization is undercut:

Ich kann natürlich das damals affenmäßig Gefühlte heute nur mit Menschenworten nachzeichnen und verzeichne es in folgedessen, aber wenn

ich auch die alte Affenwahrheit nicht mehr erreichen kann, wenigstens in der Richtung meiner Schilderung liegt sie, daran ist kein Zweifel. (303)

Naturally, what I felt at the time as an ape I can trace now only in human words and consequently I distort it, but even though I can no longer reach [touch, capture] the old ape-truth, no doubt it lies at least in the direction of my description. (198)

The question of address raised in the narrative's first line returns. If the story were not told in human terms, it would be unreadable, it would be considered simply as animalistic noise. But to express it in human terms is to misrepresent the experience, since such expression is possible only by virtue of a loss of the ape identity on which Peter has been asked to report. There is human truth and there is ape-truth; German finds this easier to express, through the compound noun *Affenwahrheit*. This might be read as a kind of self-estrangement, but is perhaps more accurately summed up by Derrida's notion of *ex-appropriation*, that is, as an experience of the loss of something – an identity, or the grounds on which an identity might be based – that was never in fact possessed (Derrida 1998, 27). The price of Peter's being able to testify to the events of his ape life is that the truth of this life become irrecoverable from the position that he must adopt in order to be able to make that identification and to speak (of) it. Identification is itself divided by expressibility: it is possible to identify something (ape life) but not to identify with it, or else it is possible to identify with the ape, but not to express that identification. Here is where Peter differs from some of Kafka's other creatures, who are never able to articulate their experiences outside of a narrative voice open to the reader but not to other characters within the story.



Point of view, position and place, especially the place from which one speaks; there is a dramaturgy here. With which position is it possible to identify? To adopt a position or to allow oneself to be positioned: each becomes loaded, leaving only one solution, a solution that Red Peter tells us he devised for himself, realizing that ‘apes belonged in front of a locker [in a cage] – well then, I had to stop being an ape’ (198). (*Aber Affen gehören bei Hagenbeck an die Kistenwand – nun, so hörte ich auf, Affe zu sein* [304].) The movement from belonging (*gehören*) to ceasing (*hören auf*) is simple enough to express in words, but how does one stop being what one ‘is’?

In Kafka’s tale, the solution to the problem turns out to be spectatorship and mimicry. Peter acknowledges that he is not capable of thinking things out in a human way, but what he can do is observe, he possesses a mimetic faculty. This observation leads to the emergence of a goal, and to a curious sense of emancipation, although he is careful to differentiate this emancipation from ordinary notions of freedom and from anything that we might be tempted to call an emancipatory politics. (This might open on to a reading in terms of the work of Jacques Rancière, but I will forego that here. For Rancière’s sense of emancipation, see 1991 and 2009). Peter instead suggests:

Ein hohes Ziel dämmerte mir auf. Niemand versprach mir, daß, wenn ich so wie sie werden würde, das Gitter aufgezo-gen werde. Solche Versprechungen für scheinbar unmögliche Erfüllungen werden nicht gegeben. Löst man aber die Erfüllungen ein, erscheinen nachträglich auch die Versprechungen genau dort, wo man sie früher vergeblich gesucht hat. (307)

A lofty goal faintly dawned before me. No one promised me that if I became like them the bars of my cage would be taken away. Such promises for

apparently impossible contingencies are not given. But if one achieves the impossible, the promises appear later retrospectively precisely where one had looked in vain for them before. (200)

‘If one achieves the impossible’: Kafka perhaps has in mind here Nietzsche’s characterization of the sovereign individual as ‘an animal which is *entitled to make promises*’ (1996, 39, emphasis original). The promise depends on a capacity for performative human utterance that Red Peter has yet to acquire, and the German text makes more strongly apparent the spoken aspect of the promise: *versprechen* (to promise) links to *sprechen* (to speak) in a way not marked in English, which instead emphasises a latinate putting in place (*promettre* from *mettre*, to put or to place, the promise as *mise-en-scène*). But the path to achieving the impossible is identifiable: imitation. He can identify the actions of the humans, their gestures and mannerisms, and thus he can imitate them. He can identify them and he can identify with them, at least in the sense of being able to repeat what he takes to be their characteristics. Michael Taussig labels this mimicry as ‘the ape aping humanity’s aping’ (1993, xviii). These gestures initially remain empty, but he gradually learns how to apply them correctly. The performance of the gesture is taken to mean that the identity of the one capable of making the gesture underwrites that performance. In other words, the gesture enacts a claim. (On this sense of the promise and the claim, see Loxley and Robson 2013).

On board ship, Red Peter acquires a teacher. One of the sailors wants to teach him to drink schnapps, and Peter tells us that this is because ‘He could not understand me, he wanted to solve the enigma of my being’ (201) (*Er begriff mich nicht, er wollte das Rätsel meines Seins lösen* [308]). Peter is eager to learn, ‘such a student of humankind no human teacher ever found on

earth' (*'einen solchen Menschenschüler findet kein Menschenlehrer auf dem ganzen Erdenrund'* [309]), he is 'impatient and desperate to emulate him' (201) [*'ungeduldig und verzweifelt, ihm nachzueifern'* [309]]. Again the parallelism of *Menschenschüler* and *Menschenlehrer* is apparent in the German. Peter's repulsion for the alcohol leads to disappointment and even though he is punished by burning, Peter says of his teacher, 'he was not angry with me, he saw that we were both fighting on the same side against the nature of apes and that I had the weightier task' (202) (*'er war mir nicht böse, er sah ein, daß wir auf der gleichen Seite die Affennatur kämpften und daß ich den schwereren Teil hatte'* [310]). The line between human and non-human animal is blurred and then redrawn, but with no possibility of forgetting that the limit has been breached. The genie is out of the schnapps bottle.

The moment at which Peter attains to speech is given full significance. With an audience of sailors, Peter steals a bottle, opens and drains it, and then throws it ostentatiously away, aware that he is performing. And then he is taken by surprise: 'because I could not help it, because it urged me, because my senses were reeling, I exclaimed a brief and unmistakable 'Hallo!', breaking into human sound, and with this call I leapt into human community and felt its echo – "Listen, he speaks!" – like a kiss over the whole of my sweat-drenched body' (203) (*weil ich nicht anders konnte, weil es mich drängte, weil mir die Sinne rauschten, kurz und gut 'Hallo!' ausrief, in Menschenlaut ausbrach, mit diesem Ruf in die Menschengemeinschaft sprang und ihr Echo: 'Hört nur, er spricht!' wie einen Kuß auf meinem ganzen schweißtriefenden Körper fühlte* [311]). To speak is become part of the human community, and it is immediately met by a recognition that is a form of repetition or echo. Call and response. But there is something involuntary here, a speaking that comes through intoxication,

as if in a parody of the poet's inspiration or the thirsty muse (as it might be found in Plato's *Ion*, for example).

Peter insists that this is imitation without pleasure or desire, that is, without will. He sees it as a way out, that is all. On his arrival in Hamburg, when faced with the choice between a place in a zoo or a place on the stage, he chooses the stage without hesitation. Remembering Berger, this might be read as a choice between two different modes of performance. But for Peter, the better of the two options is clear, a zoo is just another cage. To take his place on the variety stage, however, involves further education: 'And so I learned things, gentlemen. Ah, one learns when one has to; one learns when one needs a way out; one learns at all costs. One stands over oneself with a whip; one flays oneself at the slightest opposition' (203) (*'Und ich lernte, meine Herren. Ach, man lernt, wenn man muß; man lernt, wenn man einen Ausweg will; man lernt rücksichtslos. Man beaufsichtigt sich selbst mit der Peitsche; man zerfleischt sich beim geringsten Widerstand'* [311]). There is more than a hint here of a Nietzschean internalisation of the violence that a culture inflicts, a stink of slave-morality in the process of becoming-human that prevents Peter falling for the illusion that this equals emancipation.

Peter employs teachers, wears them out, taking lessons from several at once like a master chess player with multiple simultaneous opponents, but in Peter's case the aim is not to beat those opponents but to become them. And while he is increasingly 'enlightened', he remains unseduced:

ich überschätzte es nicht, schon damals nicht, wieviel weniger heute. Durch eine Anstrengung, die sich bisher auf der Erde nicht wiederholt hat, habe ich die Durchschnittsbildung eines Europäers erreicht. Das wäre an sich vielleicht gar nichts, ist aber insofern doch etwas, als es mir aus dem Käfig

half und mir diesen besonderen Ausweg, diesen Menschenausweg verschaffte. [...] Ich hatte keinen anderen Weg, immer vorausgesetzt, daß nicht die Freiheit zu wählen war. (312)

I did not overestimate it, not even then, much less now. With an effort which up till now has never been repeated I managed to reach the cultural level of an average European. In itself that might be nothing to speak of, but it is something insofar as it has helped me out of my cage and opened a special way out for me, the way of humanity. ... There was nothing else for me to do, provided always that freedom was not to be my choice. (204)

Kafka's tale ends with Peter's confession that while his loneliness is mitigated by a half-trained [*halbdressierte*] female chimpanzee companion, he cannot bear to look at her during the day: she has what he recognises as the insane [*Irrsinn*] look of the half-broken [*verwirrten dressierten*] animal (313). In the Muirs's English translation's neat juxtaposition, to be half-trained is to be half-broken, and this is not something that he can bring himself to see. But, crucially, it is something only he can see [*das erkenne nur ich*]. The fear here – perhaps the shame – is again a form of identification. In seeing what she has become, he sees a condition with which he can identify.

\*

In *Kafka's Monkey*, the narrative's tale of performative identity and readerly complicity becomes, among other things, a metatheatrical meditation on the relation of spectator to spectacle. This becomes freighted in a performance context in which, by presenting the creaturely – that is, neither fully human nor

meaningfully animal – aspect of Red Peter, the audience is repeatedly drawn into moments of identification. As Joseph Anderton puts it, ‘The play’s willingness to have the audience’s attention torn between Red Peter’s human performance and Hunter’s ape performance effectively perforates theatre’s fourth wall’ (2015, 83). What Hunter’s performance shows us is both the narrating figure, but also elements both of his humanized behaviour as a variety act, complete with dance steps, hat and cane routines, and so on, and also of his ‘animal’ nature just below the surface of the cultured exterior.

*Music plays and Red Peter dances a few steps of his variety routine, crossing to leave an empty bottle with someone sitting in the front row. He recrosses to begin the passage about his lesson in drinking rum while on-board ship. Isolated in a circle of light, we see the ape crouched in the cage, all pretence at being human gone. Peter observes the sailor, noting every gesture, eager to learn. But then the scene of instruction turns: Peter changes posture, one hand slapping at the floor, the other hand gesturing to the person in the audience who has the bottle. Each slap on the floor is accompanied by a grunt. The audience member must leave her or his seat and cross the stage to bring the bottle to Peter. Only then will the story resume.*

What we see here is both the imitation that Peter engages in as a form of ‘escape’ without freedom, and also the demands that Hunter makes of the audience. What this production stresses – in a way that the written text conjures but cannot make material – is the co-presence of the body of the performer and the bodies of the audience in a shared space. Following Rancière, we might be cautious about interpreting this too quickly as a version of theatre as communion and as model of community. What happens is not that the whole audience is asked to react at

once or in the same way. Hunter each time selects an individual audience member as pupil, and this also means that each night the show will differ according to the nature and speed of the response of the person chosen. A recording of the piece was available on Digital Theatre ([digitaltheatre.com](http://digitaltheatre.com)), and on this night the audience member chosen to bring the bottle to Peter/Hunter worked out relatively quickly what was required. On the day that I saw the production at the Young Vic in 2011, the person who was supposed to give the bottle to Peter/Hunter took far longer to work out what he was being asked to do, and other audience members prompted him. Such moments of contingency accentuate what has always been thought of as one of theatre's key differences from other media, especially film or television, which rarely include such moments of temporal dilation. But what it also points to is the necessarily temporal dimensions of both pedagogy and interpretation.

Much of Teevan's text is 'faithful' to Kafka's original, if we understand fidelity as a following of the structure and detail of the text in its standard English translation (but see Dewhurst 2005 for a sense of Teevan's approach to translation in other contexts). Since the Kafka piece is framed as a direct address to an audience, it is a relatively straightforward task to turn this into a script for performance. It is an addition to the Kafka source, however, that provides one of the production's most striking moments.

Towards the end of the performance, Peter demands a form of recognition. 'Smell me!', becomes his forlorn cry, since it follows the explanation that the problem Peter faces is the disgust that he feels at the odour of humanity that clings to him and, in particular, that mingles with the smell of his native land. Peter is unable to smell 'himself', to separate out the identity that he has acquired from that with which he began. It is tempting to think that the emphasis on smell is animalistic, that it breaks a human taboo and thus puts Peter firmly

back into the animal camp even as he asks for recognition of his humanization. Smell is too bound up with forms of intimacy, with disgust but also the erotic. Humans have grown accustomed to attempting to mask their smell. Peter falls between, again.

Interestingly, it is this deviation from Kafka's text that Jason Fitzgerald (2013) singles out for criticism in an otherwise positive review, finding it overly didactic, and suggesting that this moment is one that Kafka would never have allowed himself. And yet, I want to suggest that it is precisely the pedagogical frame of *Kafka's Monkey* that opens up the text to its theatrical potential. This is then a picture of communion divided, of self-division, of alienation and ex-appropriation, not of the erasure of boundaries between the human and non-human, even metaphorically. In other words, it may be read as an exposure of the ways in which adaptation reveals a gap in what it adapts, an opening in the original that presents a moment of invention.

What *Kafka's Monkey* also shows is the need for a vision of spectatorship that is not to be confused with passivity. This is not because the spectator has been made active in some way that reinforces the standard opposition of passivity and activity. Instead, it shows how being in the position of those to whom a report is made relies upon a presupposition of the distance between the experience of the one speaking and the experience of those listening. But this is an active, interpreting, judging form of listening that is anything but passive. Where the play underscores this is in all those moments where the audience is asked to perceive something which neither they nor the character/performer can bear. The play shows a fatal contamination of the testimony that Peter has been asked to give that amplifies the paradoxes of Kafka's text, materializing them on the stage, invoking the theatre as sensorium, demanding a form of response that



can only itself speak of – and from within – this contamination. Another name for this contamination is adaptation.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> I saw the production when it was revived at the Young Vic in May 2011. I have also referred to the recording made for digitaltheatre.com on 1 April 2009, although this no longer seems to be available (as at October 2015).

<sup>2</sup> While I have drawn on the standard English translation, in places I have silently modified it.